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AUTHOR Stempleski, Susan
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ABSTRACT

Authentic video material designed for its entertainment value rather than language teaching is a rich and exciting source of video software for instruction in English as a second language (ESL). Available authentic material falls into two categories: off-air recordings of television broadcasts and videocassettes for rental or purchase. This material is intrinsically motivating to students, presents real language, provides an authentic look at the culture, aids comprehension, and gives student practice in dealing with a medium. In choosing authentic material, the teacher should look carefully at its language, content, and production. There is no single correct way to use video in language teaching, but teachers experienced in intensive language practice generally agree that it is beneficial to show short segments, allow for repeated viewing, encourage active viewing, present activities before viewing, know the material, and know the equipment. Activities designed for use with a segment of the comedy feature film "High Anxiety" include descriptive, listening, and imaginative exercises using pictures only, sound only, or pictures and sound together. A bibliography is included. (MSE)

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Short Takes: Using Authentic Video in the English Class

Susan Stempleski

Hunter College of the City University of New York

Presented at the 21st IATEFL/VVLE International Conference
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SHORT TAKES:

USING AUTHENTIC VIDEO IN THE ENGLISH CLASS

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INTRODUCTION

A rich and exciting source of video software for EFL/ESL classes is authentic material: video designed for its entertainment value rather than for language teaching. Available authentic material falls into two general categories: **off-air recordings** of broadcast programs and **videocassettes for rental or purchase**. Such material is, by its very nature, intrinsically motivating to students. They experience a real feeling of accomplishment when they are able to comprehend material intended for an audience of native speakers.

This presentation will take a look at one kind of authentic video material available for use in the classroom -- feature films -- and suggest appropriate activities accompanying their use in high beginning and intermediate level EFL/ESL classrooms.

WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF AUTHENTIC VIDEO MATERIAL?

Off-Air Recordings

If you have a video cassette recorder, you can record material off-air from broadcast television programs. This is an obvious advantage in countries which broadcast programs in English. However, before using such material in the classroom, you

should familiarize yourself with copyright regulations regarding educational use of off-air recordings. In the United States, current copyright guidelines authorize non-profit educational institutions to record a TV program off-air and to use it in the classroom for 10 school days. The videotape may be kept for 45 calendar days in total, but it may not be used in the classroom beyond the first 10 school days.

Admittedly, such regulations are less than "teacher-friendly," but, hopefully, they will change in the future. In the meantime, you should be aware that such regulations are subject to changes and limitations. If you have questions about the use of certain programs, you should contact the legal department of the network concerned. In the United States, it is often possible to obtain off-air recording licenses for certain educational programs.

A practical warning: If you are using a home video cassette recorder to record television programs for classroom use, be sure that the tape speed at which you are recording matches the playback speed available on your school video player. Most currently available home video cassette recorders allow you to record at any one of three different speeds: SP, LP, or EP. By contrast, many school playback units operate at only the fastest of these tape speeds: SP. A video tape recorded at EP, for example, will not play back properly on a machine which operates only at SP.

Videocassettes for Rental or Purchase

You can rent or buy a growing range of videocassette materials. These include not only feature films, but music videos and pre-recorded TV broadcast material such documentaries, "how-to" programs, and comedy shows.

Fortunately, the copyright law regarding classroom use of such material is more

liberal than that regarding off-air recordings. Don't let the "**Home Use Only** notice on these cassettes keep you from using them with your students. The U.S. copyright law permits you to show movies and other video material in the classroom of a non-profit educational institution, as long as it is part of "face-to-face" teaching activities. Be careful, however, to use an original rented or purchased cassette. Any duplication or copying of pre-recorded videocassettes is illegal.

WHY USE AUTHENTIC VIDEO MATERIAL?

Unlike EFL/ESL video courses, such as **Your Life in Your Hands** or **American Scenes**, which are specifically designed with the needs and interests of language learners in mind, authentic material is ungraded with regard to the language used. Additionally, the topics and situations presented may not always be geared to student interests. Obviously, you will have to spend time previewing material to use in your classes. Is the preparation time worth the effort in resulting student motivation? Why bother to use authentic video material? What can authentic material do that video courses specially designed for language teaching cannot? Among the compelling reasons for using authentic material in EFL/ESL classes are the following:

1. It can motivate students.

Students experience a real feeling of acomplishment when they are able to comprehend material intended for native speakers. When they are successful at dealing with and understanding "the real thing", they are further motivated to seek out and understand other authentic materials. They now realize, that, with a bit of extra effort and practice, along with some help from the teacher, "real English" is not beyond their comprehension.

2. It presents real language.

While the language presented in feature films is not real in the sense of being unscripted, it is real in the sense that it is intended for native speakers -- people already familiar with the language. It is ungraded and unsimplied, spoken at a normal pace and in typical accents. The language is also real in the sense of being current, that is, it makes use of idioms and expressions common in contemporary English-speaking environments.

3. It provides an authentic look at the culture.

Through viewing films and other programs intended for native speakers, students can see how people in the target language culture live --- their values, customs, clothing, food, and how the people in that culture interact with one another. Carefully chosen video material can provided countless topics for cross-cultural dicussions and writing activities.

4. It aids comprehension.

Authentic video material provides visual information which can help students to better understand the situations and language presented. With audio cassettes, where important visual elements of communication -- such as body language -- are absent, video presents the total communicative act. Visual clues to meaning, such as the clothing worn by speakers or the gestures they use, can help to make meaning clearer to student viewers. Even the music used on a video can be an aid to comprehension.

5. It gives students practice in dealing with the medium.

If students are to take in and process films and television effectively, they must have practice in dealing with the medium. In "The Video Age," it only makes sense to incorporate the medium into teaching so that students may become more effective and critical viewers. Most students already watch an enormous amount of television. Teachers can help make this everyday viewing activity a real learning experience.

WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR IN CHOOSING AUTHENTIC MATERIAL?

Each type of authentic material has both advantages and disadvantages when used as language learning material. However, it may be helpful to review some of the more general features to look for when selecting authentic material. As you preview a videocassette, you might ask yourself the following questions:

Language

- o Is the language used in the video transferable to real life situations which students are likely to come across?
- o Is it "authentic" in the sense of being close to the language used by native speakers in their daily lives?
- o Is it contextualized? That is, is it presented in a situation which will help to make the meaning clearer to students?
- o Do the characters speak slowly and naturally enough to be understood by students? Do they speak clearly?
- o Are there natural pauses in the dialogue which will give students time to absorb the meaning?

o Are the accents likely to be familiar to students?

o Does the video present language features that students are studying in class?

Content

o Is the subject of the video likely to be of interest to students?

o Does the video accurately represent the culture of the country where the language being studied is spoken?

o Is the story or topic treated in an interesting way?

o Are there characters or situations presented which students are likely to encounter?

o Is the program relatively straightforward in its presentation?

Production

o Is the picture clear?

o Is the sound clear?

o Is the camera work steady ?

o Is the camera usually focused on the person who is speaking?

o Are there fairly frequent close-ups of the people speaking?

o Is the video itself attractive?

o Is it well acted and well directed?

HOW CAN AUTHENTIC VIDEO MATERIAL BE USED?

There is no one "right" way to use video in language teaching. There are as many effective techniques for using video as there are for using a computer, chalkboard,

textbook, or any other educational tool available today. What you do with a particular piece of video material will depend on the needs of your students, your own objectives, the machinery available, and the video material itself. Nevertheless, there are a few ground rules which teachers experienced with using video for intensive language practice agree generally agree on:

1. Show short segments.

Video, particularly authentic material intended for an audience of native speakers, is an extremely dense medium. There are so many elements at work -- both visual and sound -- that a lower level language learner can be easily overwhelmed. Don't feel compelled to use an entire video program. A feature film, for example, can be successfully exploited, even in beginning and low intermediate classes, if presented in carefully selected, "bite-size" chunks more easily digestible to students. A 1-2 minute segment, taken out of context, can often provide enough material for a one-hour language lesson.

2. Allow for repeated viewing.

Most students will be happy, and usually eager, to view a video segment several times, particularly if provided with a variety of engaging activities which give them a chance to master vocabulary, identify characters, and examine other facets of the video more closely. By repeated viewing I do not mean simply playing the video, rewinding it, playing it again, then rewinding it and playing it again. Each viewing should be accompanied by a purposeful, task-based activity.

3. Encourage active viewing.

Most people take a passive approach to television. If students are to use the medium to improve their language skills, they have to learn to take a more active viewing role. They need to have a purpose - other than mere pleasure and relaxation - when they view. Teachers can help promote purposeful, active viewing by providing students with challenging activities which require them to focus on selected aspects of the video, such as cultural differences, setting, situation, and language. The comprehension gained from purposeful viewing activities, will increase, rather than detract from, student enjoyment.

4. Present activities before viewing.

In most cases, students should be told what they will be expected to look for **before** they view a video segment. In this way, related language activities will be more productive. Knowing exactly what they will have to do following the viewing will help students to deliberately and effectively focus their attention on relevant aspects of the video and more successfully accomplish viewing tasks set by the teacher.

5. Know the video material.

The teacher should view the entire video segment before presenting it to the class, preferably several times and with the video script, if available. If none is available, the teacher can make a transcript and/or notes of the language items presented for reference and, if desired, for distribution to students as study material. Knowing the material will make the teacher more confident and better able to handle questions from the students concerning language content or other aspects of the video.

6. **Know your equipment.**

Before using video cassette playback equipment in class, practice with it so that you know what the different buttons do and how quickly (or slowly) they respond when pushed. Use the counter. Before showing a videocassette in class, it is a good idea to set the counter on your player at zero at the start of the cassette. Then make a note of the counter numbers at the start of the video segment -- and at any other points you choose. This will prevent the waste of valuable class time (and the subsequent loss of student interest) spent searching for a particular scene or point in a scene. It is extremely important to be familiar with the machinery you will actually use in class. Various models and brands of video equipment respond differently, and not all counters use the same numbering system.

USING A SEGMENT OF A FEATURE FILM

The following activities are based on a one-minute segment of a commercially-available videotaped version* of the film "**High Anxiety**," Mel Brooks' zany but affectionate parody of Hitchcock's "**Vertigo**." In the scene selected, a psychiatrist, Dr. Richard Thorndike (Mel Brooks), gets a surprise visit in his hotel room from a stranger, Victoria Brisbane (Madeleine Kahn). The language of the scene includes repeated commands, such as "Be quiet!" and "Go to your room!" and relatively simple questions such as "Who is it?" and "Who are you?" The sometimes exagerrated gestures, actions and facial expressions of the speakers help to make the dialogue --spoken at a rather fast, natural pace --clear.

The following activities are not presented in any particular, recommended order, nor is it necessary to carry out all of them with any particular video segment. They

* Magnetic Video, 1981.

are offered simply as suggestions for activity types which I have tried out in class and found sucessful at stimulating language use among students. Within a one-hour language class, it is desirable to have students engage in at least three or four different activities. Keep student attention and motivation at a peak by limiting small group discussion to 3-5 minutes and then moving on to another activity.

1. Pictures Only: What's the Situation?

A popular technique for teaching with video is "Silent Viewing." Before seeing a scene for the first time, students are told to look for the answers to such questions as: Where are these people? Why are they there? What is their relationship to each other? What are they talking about? What is going on? Students then view the scene with the sound **turned down**. After viewing, students work in small groups for 3-5 minutes discussing the questions and giving reasons for their answers. The teacher then plays the scene again with the sound **turned up**. Students, either as a whole class or in small groups, discuss their answers in relation to the new information they have from the sound track.

2. Pictures Only: What's the Dialogue?

A variation of the "Silent Viewing" technique is to have the students watch the video with the sound **turned down** and then, working in pairs, write a dialogue of 6-10 lines to accompany the pictures. Students then perform their dialogues for the class. Finally, they get to see the film with the sound **turned up** and compare the scripts they have created with the actual dialogue used in the film.

3. Pictures Only: Matching Dialogue and Gestures

In another variation of the "Silent Viewing" technique, students are given a list of four or five lines of dialogue from the scene. The teacher then tells the students to observe the gestures used by the characters. After seeing the video with the sound **turned down**, they work in pairs or groups to match each of the lines of dialogue with an appropriate gesture used in the scene. Finally, the teacher plays the scene with the sound **turned up** and students check their answers.

4. Sound Only: What Will You See?

Students are allowed to hear the sound track of the video without seeing the pictures. (The teacher covers the screen with a large sheet of paper or a cloth). The teacher tells the class to listen to the dialogue and sound effects and predict what they will see: How many characters? Where does the scene take place? What is the relationship of the characters? How are they dressed? What actions or activities take place? After listening to the sound track, students work in small groups, discussing the questions and giving reasons for their answers. The teacher then plays the scene with both sound and pictures. Students discuss their answers in relation to the visual information presented on the video.

5. Sight and Sound: Who Said It?

Before viewing the video, students are provided with five to seven lines of dialogue and the names of the characters. After viewing the video, with the sound **turned up**, they match each line of dialogue with the name of the character who said it.

6. Sight and Sound: What Was the Line?

Students are given a list of key words or expressions used in the video dialogue. After viewing the video segment in its entirety, they attempt to recall the line of dialogue in which each word or expression was used. Then they view the video again and compare what they recall with what was actually said.

7. Sight and Sound: Repeat the Dialogue.

The teacher plays the video sequence and, using the pause or freeze-frame control button, stops the action on the screen and has the students repeat the line of dialogue just spoken using the same intonation and stress patterns used by the actors.

8. Sight and Sound: Study the Role

Role-playing is a particularly appropriate technique with video. Different groups of students can be told to watch the video segment and study the language, gestures and actions of a particular character. For example,while viewing the one-minute "High Anxiety" scene, some students can be told to focus on Richard Thorndike, while others are directed to pay attention to Victoria Brisbane. After three or four viewings, pairs of students are asked to re-enact the story . Teachers are often surprised at students' ability to reproduce a short scene without mistakes in grammar, sense or tone of voice.

9. Sight and Sound: Describing What Happened

Students watch the entire video segment and then, working in pairs or small groups prepare an oral or written summary of what they saw, in chronological order and

with as much detail as possible. An interesting variation of this technique is to create an "information gap" by allowing only half of the class to view the scene. The viewers then have to describe to the other students what they saw. Another variation is to have half the students **see** the scene (pictures only, no sound), and then have the other students **hear** the soundtrack (sound only, no pictures). Viewers and listeners then work in pairs to produce an accurate and complete description of what happened.

10. Sight and Sound: Predicting the Future

While Technique 8 is concerned with describing what happened in the past, "Predicting the Future" involves having the students talk or write about what they think will happen in the future. The teacher shows a short scene (or part of a scene) one or several times, then stops it the video and asks the students to predict what the characters or going to say and do next.

CONCLUSIONS

In a brief presentation such as this it is impossible to go into great detail about techniques for using authentic video in language teaching. My intention has been to present some techniques I have used and, hopefully, to inspire you to experiment with authentic video in your own classes. With a little practice, you will find video easy to use and well worth the effort in resulting student motivation and language learning. Used properly, authentic video can be exciting and stimulating -- for both students and teachers.

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